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ABSTRACT

Music can be an effective motivational vehicle for teaching listening skills, literature, oral and nonverbal communication, creative writing, handwriting, spelling, and grammar. One idea for integrating music into the language arts involves the use of song lyrics as reading materials. Since contemporary country music, and its precursor folk music, has a story to tell, primarily about people, the song lyrics can easily be used in the same way as traditional material in reading instruction. A teacher should first accumulate a large quantity of recorded country and folk music with printed lyrics, which can be separated according to ability levels based on vocabulary, subject matter, and other readability factors, and then develop exciting and challenging worksheets. After introducing a country music song to a class, the teacher can use its text to expand vocabulary, can have the class identify figurative language, and can make the children aware of alternative language styles in the song. Country music can provide situations for creative and practical writing activities, including language experience stories, new lyrics for a country or folk song, or letters to the recording artists. Country music can be used to introduce a parallel topic in literature, and children can learn library skills by researching the lives of the recording artists or composers. (Suggestions for activities and worksheets are included.) (HOD)

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Using Country Music to Teach Language Arts

June Lane

Music has great appeal for children. Because of this natural appeal, music is frequently used as a motivational aid to the teaching of reading, writing, and other areas of the Language Arts.

Since music creates pleasure and can help make school a happy place, it can add that important ingredient -- joy -- to intellectual tasks. If we develop activities directly connected with music to assist in the teaching of reading and the Language Arts, we can capitalize on the interest of children and help make learning a pleasant undertaking.

Many educators believe that participation in musical activities not only motivates students, but also helps them to develop essential reading and Language Arts skills. Music can be an effective motivational vehicle for teaching listening skills, literature, oral and non-verbal communication, creative writing, handwriting, spelling and grammar.

Among the many uses of music in teaching Language Arts skills are:

1. Promotion of language development.
2. Use of song lyrics as reading materials.
3. Coordination of musical concepts with literature and language.
4. Development of listening skills through musical activities.
5. Heightening of language awareness through a focus on musical rhythmn.

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Contemporary music definitely includes country music, which has become increasingly popular during the last few years.

The Country Music Encyclopedia defines country music in the following way:

> Country music is the catch-all term for a commercial American popular music with strong southern (and sometimes western) roots. It developed out of the reservoir of ballads and folk songs brought to North America by the earliest English immigrants and through the years absorbed influences from other musical sources.

Country music's origins are in the folk songs of the southern mountain people, therefore we can, for our purposes, include folk songs in suggesting the use of country music in teaching Language Arts. Folk songs, too, possess fascinating content, which tells stories that concern people's hopes, dreams and experiences.

Since country and folk music have a story to tell, primarily about people, the song lyrics can easily be used in the same way as traditional material in the teaching of reading. Song lyrics can be used to promote visual reading skills. The use of song lyrics in a reading program can be used as a special unit of study or as diversionary activities once a week. They might even be used as individualized units with contained packets that run sequentially to develop specific skills in a variety of ways.

If used in a reading and Language Arts program it, first of all, becomes necessary to accumulate a large quantity of recorded music with printed lyrics.

Where lyrics aren't printed on the record jackets, record companies can be written to request lyrics, for copying lyrics by ear from the record is often too time consuming.

After the music and lyrics have been accumulated, lyrics can be separated according to ability levels. Vocabulary and subject content are the main indicators of ability level, although other readability factors may be taken into consideration (including sentence structure, phrasing, and clearness of ideas).

It's necessary to be very careful in the choice of songs. Vocabulary is all important in choosing the song lyrics. If the vocabulary is over more than two or three ability levels, it becomes confusing.

Content should be suitable for children, and words should be distinct in the music, so that children can hear the words clearly. In this way, auditory discrimination skills can be developed.

To go along with the appropriate song materials, work sheets can be developed. A series of two to four worksheets seems ample.

The worksheets may include practice on skills. There might also be one for comprehension and one for vocabulary.

The teacher can design worksheets that are exciting and challenging to the children. The more creative and unusual the worksheets, the more interested and involved the children will become. Worksheets can be adjusted to meet individual needs of the children, whether they be primary or intermediate students.

Each child can then be given or can make a folder for the lyrics and worksheets to be used.

Suggestions for worksheets dealing with reading skills include the following activities for phonics and structural analysis:

1. Recognizing Beginning Sounds
2. Rhyming Words
3. Recognizing Root Words, Prefixes and Suffixes
4. Identifying Compound Words
5. Pronunciation and Syllabication

Questions can be given on worksheets to develop comprehension skills. Recall, main ideas, details, sequence, inference, summarizations, comparisons and contrasts can be dealt with on the worksheets, and adapted to ability levels.

Vocabulary can be increased by including worksheets that deal with definitions, antonyms and synonyms. After introducing a country music song, vocabulary expansion can be furthered by a general discussion of the text.

In the discussion of the song lyrics, figurative language can be identified, and children can be made aware of alternate language styles where applicable. Words that are used effectively in communicating a message can be discussed. Children can become aware of mood words as well.

Besides being an excellent vehicle for teaching reading, country music will provide situations which encourage creative and practical writing and oral expression as well.

Country music songs and folk songs can become the basis for language experience stories. Stories about favorite pets, family or personal experiences may emerge after listening to a particular song. The children might want to have a song replayed and write as they listen to the music.

Children can write endings to a song that tells a story after the music has been played to a certain point; or children can simply react, written or orally to music that has been played.

They can relate what thoughts or images are conjured up in their minds. Or perhaps they can indicate a color that comes to mind when they hear the music. The children can discuss the reasons for their choices and even illustrate them with crayons and paints. An opportunity for everyone to react and communicate is given. Children are encouraged to give their opinions. In such an environment they will feel secure because there will be no wrong answers. Everyone is right.

Another activity is to have children write new lyrics for a country music song or a folk song.

Many times, a country music lyric can be read as poetry and can motivate children to write their own poetry (which they in turn might put to music themselves). Choral reading can be fun with country music, too.

Certainly literature and music can be integrated. The music can be used to introduce a topic, discussion can follow and related books can be read.

Pantomiming words and phrases from songs can be fun for children, or dramatizing the story itself can be done.

Any number of other activities involving country music might be used in the teaching of Language Arts. Teachers can be very creative with their own ideas.

Song lyrics can be used for handwriting practice. First the lyrics can be sung, and then the lyrics could be copied by the children in their very best script. The meanings of the sentences, grammar, similar lines and spelling can be discussed before the lyrics are copied.

Another activity is for the lyrics to be copied on 3 X 5 cards -- one word per card.

The words could then be put in alphabetical order, or used to make new sentences, or used for identifying parts of speech. Nouns, descriptors, action words, connecting words and prepositions could be categorized.

Word insertion and substitution games can be played using the lyrics of country music, where a new subject or noun or a new verb can be inserted to change the sentences.

Crossword puzzles could be made using the lyrics of a song. It could prove to be fun!

Children could write letters to recording artists in care of the record company, telling how much the music was enjoyed, or the letters could be written to the recording artist.

Research on the lives of the music artists or on the composers could be done by the children. Use your own ideas!

Try using country music as an approach to teaching Language Arts! You may find it enjoyable as well as successful!

The following dittoes were a handout to participants at my session.

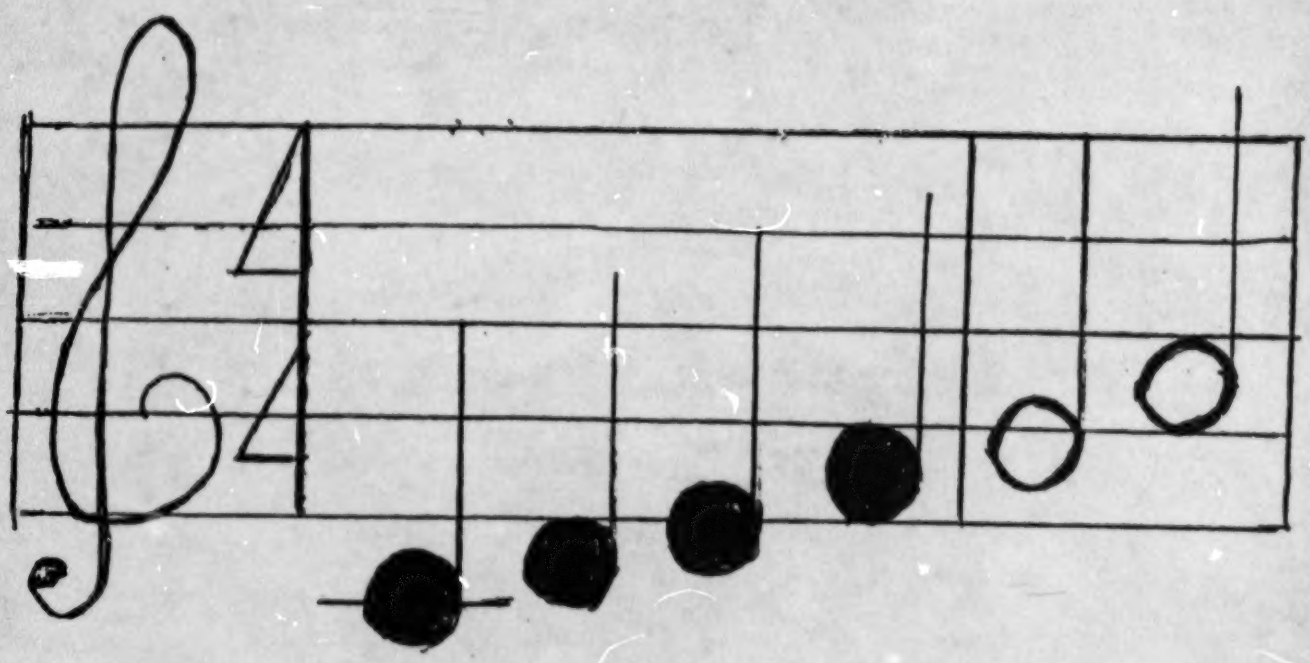
June Lane

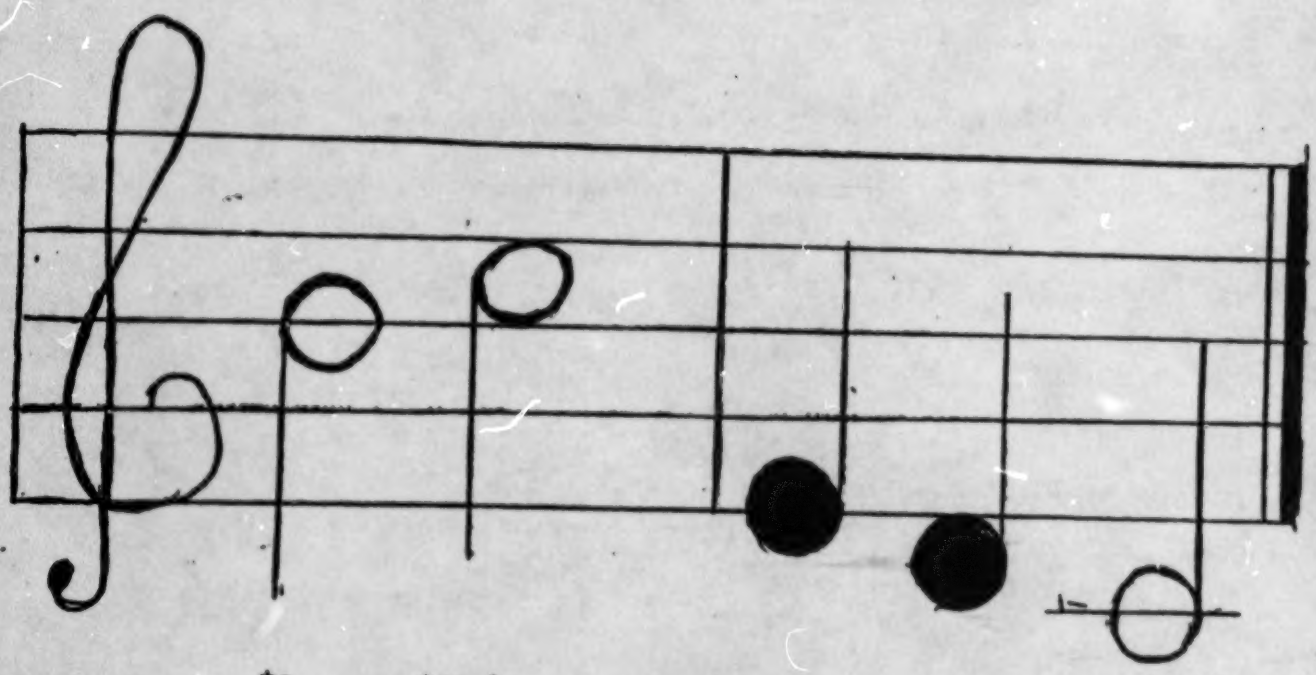
Lyrics of Coal Miner's Daughter by Loretta Lynn and Coat of Many Colors by Dolly Parton were removed due to copyright restrictions.

USING COUNTRY MUSIC TO TEACH LANGUAGE ARTS

by

June Lane





Country music can be an effective motivational vehicle for teaching reading, listening skills, literature, oral and non-verbal communication, creative writing, handwriting, spelling and grammar, because music has a great appeal for children and can aid in making learning pleasurable.

In many country music songs stories are told concerning real people and their problems. For this reason, the lyrics of country music songs can be used in the same way as traditional material for teaching reading, and can be an effective alternative method for teaching basic reading skills.

Country music songs can also become the basis for language experience stories, for creative writing, and for other language arts skills.

Attached are the lyrics to the country music song "Coal Miner's Daughter," written by Loretta Lynn. After the song is played for the children and the lyrics are read, activities, such as those in the examples on the two work-sheets that follow, can be used.

Also attached are the lyrics to "Coat of Many Colors," written by Dolly Parton. These lyrics can easily be used for teacher-directed discussion and creative writing activities designed by the teacher, after the song is heard and the lyrics are read.

Finally, a list of suggested song titles which can be used in the classroom is attached. Contemporary folk songs as well as country music songs have been included, for country music did evolve from folk songs. Traditional folk songs are also excellent material, but have not been included, as they are well known. There are many other songs that might be added, but teachers will have their own preferences in selecting suitable materials.

Country music can be an exciting way to approach the teaching of Language Arts. Try it! You may find it enjoyable as well as successful!

June Lane

COAL MINER'S DAUGHTER

Understanding the Story

Answer these questions:

1. Where was the Coal Miner's daughter born?
2. How large was the Coal Miner's family?
3. Why is the Coal Miner's daughter proud of her family?
4. List three jobs that Mommie had.
5. List three jobs that Daddy had.
6. Name some things that showed how poor the Coal Miner's family was.
7. Where did the family get their shoes?
8. In what ways did Daddy earn money for the family.

Questions for discussion:

1. What seemed more important than money in the Coal Miner's family? Would you agree or disagree?
2. Describe the Coal Miner's family. Would you have liked being a part of his family? Why or why not?
3. Did the Coal Miner's daughter stay in Butcher Holler? What do you think became of her?

COAL MINER'S DAUGHTER

Vocabulary

I. Define these words and use each in a sentence of your own:

1. shoveled
2. catalog
3. complain
4. memory
5. hoeing
6. well
7. drew

II. Underline the suffix in each of the following words. Then write the root word:

1. rocked
2. shoveled
3. scrubbed
4. selling
5. hoeing
6. loved
7. managed
8. changed

III. Match the meanings:

1. coal miner
2. wash-board
3. Bible
4. Butcher Holler

____ names a place where the Coal Miner's daughter was born

____ used for scrubbing clothes

____ Holy Book

____ a person who works in a coal mine

IV. Listing

1. List five words that name things _____, _____, _____, _____, _____.

2. List five action words _____, _____, _____, _____, _____.

SUGGESTED SONG TITLES

Country Music Songs

1. "Coal Miner's Daughter"
2. "Coat of Many Colors"
3. "El Paso City"
4. "Country Roads"
5. "Cripple Creek"
6. "Driving My Life Away"
7. "I Love a Rainy Night"
8. "The Battle of New Orleans"
9. "Wildwood Flower"
10. "Sixteen Tons"
11. "Wabash Cannon Ball"
12. "I'm Just a Country Boy"

Contemporary Folk Songs

1. "Puff the Magic Dragon"
2. "500 Miles"
3. "M.T.A."
4. "Blowing in the Wind"
5. "This Land is Your Land"
6. "Where Have all the Flowers Gone?"